A Talk with Dr. Nadine Barrett

In November, Dr. Nadine Barrett was asked to share with me information regarding her multiple leadership roles at Duke. She was also asked to respond to a series of questions about her work, passion and vision for diversity and inclusion.

Prior to joining Duke, Dr. Barrett was the Director of Community Programs at the Susan G. Komen for the Cure organization; where she led several funded community engagement programs to reduce breast cancer disparities and successfully engaged domestic and international affiliates to strategically identify community needs and allocate resources to increase breast cancer screening and reduce mortality.

Dr. Barrett has been a speaker and participant in efforts around diversity, inclusion and health care disparities; providing educational seminars and forums throughout the Duke, local, regional and national communities.

Dr. Barrett is the recipient of several awards and honors, including the American Sociology Association’s Minority Fellowship Doctoral Award, NIH Postdoctoral Fellowship in Health Services Research at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and the Martin Luther King, Southern Christian Leadership Conference Drum Major for Justice Award for her work in community health.

-Robert T. Crouch, Ed.D, Assistant Director, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Duke University Office for Institutional Equity

Interview Questions:

Q: Many in the Duke community may not be aware of the many contributions you make here in our community. Please share with us about your multiple leadership roles and work here at Duke.

As a Medical Sociologist with 20-years of experience engaging diverse health systems and communities, I have devoted my career to reducing health disparities among disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. Currently, I serve as the inaugural director of both the Office of Health Equity and Disparities at the Duke Cancer Institute and the Duke CTSA Community Connections and Collaborations Core, Center for Community and Population Health Improvement. I am also a faculty member in the Department of Community and Family Medicine’s Division of Community Health.

In its first five years, under my leadership the Office of Health Equity and Disparities team within the Duke Cancer Institute has created a strong platform for authentic community engagement, research and innovative training. As the first director, I apply my expertise, vision and direction to strategically
address cancer disparities through three core program goals: (1) Increase access and utilization of cancer services from screening to survivorship through Community and Patient Navigation; (2) Develop and implement tailored interventions and training to increase diversity and inclusion in research, clinical trials and the workforce; and (3) Facilitate and conduct authentic community engaged research and programs to reduce cancer disparities.

I also direct the, Community Engagement Core within the Duke CTSI. I work with a phenomenal team to develop and implement an infrastructure designed to strengthen the capacity of the research enterprise and diverse stakeholders to engage in partnered research across the translational spectrum. In ten months this team has developed a suite of programs and services to build capacity, and facilitate connections and collaborations, and to conduct community driven research, generate and fund new and innovative research ideas, and provide training and resources to enhance stakeholder engagement in Duke Health research.

Q: What led you to Duke to fulfill your current role?

The long story….My life experiences as an undocumented immigrant coming to the United States from England, the challenges I witnessed as my mother worked hard, often holding three jobs to ensure I had access to the opportunities the United States had to offer, and my extensive experience working with and living in diverse and at times, impoverished communities led me to both acknowledge the depth of inequality, the need for equity, and the amazing opportunity for collective greatness through an authentic appreciation of diversity. My role at the DCI was new, and allowed me to work with our stakeholders to develop an Office of Health Equity and Disparities that will work to address critical needs in community engagement, diversity in research, and health disparities education and training programs. Building the Office from the ground up with an amazing team and our diverse community partners has been truly rewarding.

Q: Please describe from your point-of-view, connections between your work and diversity and inclusion.

It is critical to my work that we embrace and engage diversity in its broadest sense. OHED has strong community relationships across diverse communities including the Latino, Asian, African American, white, poor, rural and urban communities. Diversity spans beyond race, ethnicity, age, sexual and gender identity and includes array of categories that we use to understand the world including professional positions such as faculty and staff. It is important that our partnerships and all aspects of our work reflects our diversity in its broadest sense. The voice and perspectives of our diverse community, including staff, faculty, patients, caregivers and the broader community is front and center as we aim to address health disparities and promote health equity at Duke and across our community.

Q: Why is a deep appreciation for diversity and inclusion so important in your work?

We have so much to learn from each other and without genuine engagement across all social categories in which we are diverse, we will lack the ability to be and give our very best as individuals and as an institution. In my roles here at Duke, my effectiveness and impact is only as great as my appreciation and willingness to work with and leverage the expertise of diverse communities toward collaborative
programs, services, and research. This is a critical component to health equity that we can’t afford to take lightly.

Q: How does your work currently impact Duke’s academic, health and social climate? For example, your ‘Prism of Difference’ work?

Many years ago I developed a program called the Prism of Difference and have since modified it to fit any social institution including the healthcare system, the research enterprise, and our diverse lay communities. Through this program, I use a medical sociological framework to illustrate how collective behaviors and assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, class etc., actually contribute to health disparities. Participants enjoy the program because it raises awareness about our biases and provides a framework to self-assess and potentially modify our behaviors. I have been providing this talk across Duke Health, and within the DCI, as part of the Just Ask program designed to increase diversity in clinical trials, and the workforce.

Q: Please share one or two hobbies and/or interests (e.g., traveling, hiking, reading, etc.) outside of your role at Duke University.

I love spending time with my family, traveling, and looking for the next great idea! My favorite hobby is playing tennis. I could play every day if I had sponsors!